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ABSTRACT

It is difficult to single out a primary factor leading to the establishment of one's attitude toward reading, but environment, particularly the home, probably provides the greatest influence. Because teachers influence students, they have the potential for influencing students' attitudes toward reading. Whether teachers are seen as readers or nonreaders, their attitudes toward reading, and their attitudes toward the students themselves will influence students' reading habits and attitudes. In order to carefully assess their students' attitudes and interests toward reading, teachers should utilize structured observation and interviews; be cautious about judging students because of their sex, reading achievement, home background, or natural origin; remember that their relationship with students is vitally important; read extensively to the students; and encourage students to undertake free reading in their areas of interest. (JL)

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Teachers Attitudes Toward Reading and Their Students' Reading Habits

Leland A. McMillen and Charles A. Sloan

This article was developed through the professional concern over the lack of understanding of teachers toward children's reading habits. While working with pre-service undergraduate students and teachers in schools in Minnesota and Illinois, a grave concern emerged.

How well do teachers know their students' reading habits? What do teachers use to judge their students' reading habits? Extensive research has been conducted on the cognitive aspect of the reading but relatively little attention has been given to the affective area (Smith and Barrett, 1974; Roettger, Szymozuk, and Millard, 1979; Lamme, 1976.) While it is necessarily important to discover how children learn to read, there is also reason to discover how children feel about reading; and it should be significant to discover why they feel as they do.

Krathwohl, Bloom, and Masia (1966) observed that as teachers they used various types of educational objectives beyond the cognitive domain. They defined the objectives as thought, feelings, and actions. Prior to their efforts, Lichtenstein (1934) and Remmers and Gage (1955) perceived that statements of instructional objectives included, among expected outcomes, gains in habits, skills, and attitudes. In other words, there has been an expression of the importance of why children feel as they do about reading as an educational outcome without much research evidence to explain this importance.

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Perception of the Distinction Between Attitude and Interest

In question here are two psychological features of personality termed attitude and interest, Harris and King (1969) among others, make a distinction between interest in reading and attitude toward reading. They elaborate thus:

> Attitudes do not necessarily entail interest, but interest does involve an attitude. If reading fulfills a need, positive attitudes toward reading usually develop, but a positive attitude toward books does not necessarily lead to an active reading of books. Attitudes vary with the reader's ability, background, efforts, and peer influences.

Remmers (1954) notes that a salient distinction between attitude and interest is that an interest is perceived as merely indicating the degree of preference one holds for an object at a conscious level, whether the action toward the object or idea is approving or disapproving. An attitude, on the other hand, is perceived as indicating reaction toward the object or idea in terms of the direction, pleasure or displeasure, agreement or disagreement. Getzels (1969) provides an additional view:

> an attitude implies a disposition to react in a particular direction with respect to a given object. We do not ordinarily speak of being driven by an attitude; we are necessarily driven by our interests.

In applying this distinction, Kennedy and Halinski (1975) state as follows:

> Thus, the development of attitudes precedes the development of interest. For the classroom teacher, this means that a positive attitude toward reading on the part of the student must be present before the goal of making students lifetime readers can be realized.

Perception of Attitude and Interest Toward Reading

Because of the complex interaction, as well as the variety of causes, it is difficult to single out a primary factor leading to the establishment of one's attitude toward reading. Psychologists report that attitudes are learned Doob (1974); Remmers (1954); Staats (1968); Sherif, 1965; however, it is not completely understood how they are learned. Environmental factors determine whether one will develop a positive or negative attitude. No

single cause can be designated as being sole contributor to attitude toward reading. Home, peers, neighborhood, and school have been suggested in a broad sense; Koe (1978); O'Rourke (1979).

Nothing can be concluded about how attitudes toward reading are learned. Apparently each individual responds to the stimuli from a personal point of reference although it is assumed and strongly suggested, that the home may provide the greatest influence for the development of attitude toward reading, Hansen (1973). Interests, Getzels (1956) reports, are determined by our physical structure and capacities, personality and various conscious and unconscious needs, social and cultural groups, age and sex role requirements, family influences, and accidental involvements. In other words, the degree of interest one has in reading would be the result of the various experiences one has had with appropriate models for identification.

As with attitudes Rudman (in Jersild and Tasch, 1957) claims that interests are learned. He points out that we have an interest only in those things with which we are familiar. Environment is again a factor Russell, 1961; Davis and Taylor (1943). Yet Witty (1960) expands this to include personality by noting, "Interests should be looked upon as acquired, although they are based upon such factors as the constitutional nature of the individual and his personality as affected by unique experiences in his particular environment."

Similarly with attitude toward reading, achievement is related to interests toward reading. According to Russell (1961) and Cleworth (1958) a person with reading skills deficiencies does not have a great tendency to read because there will be little desire to participate in an activity when one has a limited degree of proficiency. Home, school and personality, then, are closely interrelated to interest toward reading.

Teacher Perception of Students' Attitudes and Interest

In a study reported by Ransbury (1973) classroom teachers reported that they considered a good reader to be a student who, 1) completes assignments or 2) is bright. In other words, if students complete assignments and are bright they like to read. Teachers also seemed to assume that students from poor and homes of the uneducated do not like to read. Ransbury speculated that the teachers may be basing their judgement of students' reading in relation to skill development. Ransbury asked:

> Why do we, as classroom teachers, feel that an intelligent child who exhibits a behavior pattern which could be labeled 'teacher pleasing' consider that child to have a positive reading attitude? Would it not be possible for a child to be a 'good student' and still not enjoy reading in his leisure time?

Teacher Attitude Toward Reading

Probably the most important element in the education process is the teacher Artley (1969); Haffner and Slobodian (1969); Gentile and McMillan (1976). A teacher that is knowledgeable, understanding and adaptable will tend to create a comfortable learning environment. Thus it is essential that a teacher have the above qualities in order to accommodate the largest possible percentage of student variation and needs, Lipton (1969). On the opposite side rigid and inflexible teachers were found by Lipton to have less success with retarded readers.

Grambs (1959); Wilson (1959); Russell (1961); Brown (1964); LaBrant (1964); Robinson (1969); Mueller (1973); and Scholfield and Start, (1976); argue that in order to develop positive attitudes toward reading, teacher's must also have a positive attitude toward reading. Because teachers influence students, they have the potential for influencing students' attitudes toward reading. Accordingly, the teacher must be seen as a reader; it is important that this

characteristic be revealed to the students so they can emulate it, Robinson (1969); Moushow (1975).

In fact Mueller (1973) placed the burden on teachers by stating that:

> Since teachers teach what they themselves stand for, pupils are certain to be affected when the teachers shows excitement and enthusiasm over reading a book. They will be no less influenced by a teacher's apathy toward reading.

It was Mueller's concern that teachers come to grips with their attitudes and attempt to direct students accordingly. Even though a teacher may value reading only as a tool for study, this teacher would not be expected to change but should use that value to guide students in recognizing the need for reading skills as a means of studying. Teachers who are reluctant that readers could identify with similar students while teachers who are avid readers identify with similar students. Hence, the goal was not to force teachers to change but to realize their position and understand the potential influence they could have on their students.

LaBrant (1964) on the other hand was not as willing as Mueller to concede that teachers should value reading only as a tool,

> Unless we ourselves read widely, unless we show by our own lives that reading is something more than a skill to be used in following headlines, and television guides, in passing tests, or in handling textbooks, we ought to be in some business that does not require bringing preaching and practice together.

In like manner Grambs (1959) was concerned when he stated that book reports were probably one of the most deadly reading activities carried on in the schools. He further stated: "A teacher who is herself a non-reader is probably the next most significant factor influencing the potential reading habits of young people." He also points out the need for teacher to read widely in order to be conversant with students who have broad interests.

Finally, Agin (1975) in her summary of reading research concludes from authors in the field that "teachers are the main difference in the reading process" and "the attitude of the teacher is the main ingredient...(in) getting children to read."

Teacher-Pupil Relations

Not only must we be concerned with teachers' attitudes toward reading, but teachers' reaction to their students who also stressed in the literature. Teachers who were regarded as non-directive created a warm friendly atmosphere conducive to learning and forming positive attitudes toward reading Rist (1970).

On the other hand, when children are frustrated by classroom teachers they may develop the notion that the teacher is discriminating against them. This in turn may lead to negative reactions to the teacher's future criticism Remmers (1954). Accordingly, attitude as a predisposition to respond then becomes meaningful.

Heider (1946) also views attitudes as being the consequence of a person's forming an attitude toward something as a result of the influence of a significant other person. The subsequent relation to the attitude object is then regarded as favorable or unfavorable. Because these events are occurring simultaneously, there is reinforcement because this association of events is contiguous.

Stevens (1971) raised the question of students' self perception and how others perception of problem readers, student's reaction to self and other's reaction to students who were having reading problems.

> What about teacher attitudes toward pupils in remedial reading? Do teachers consciously or unconsciously express negative feelings toward the remedial readers when working with them during individual classroom activities?

His study that remedial readers perceive themselves as different and not as socially acceptable; they know their social standing. Likewise their classmates viewed them in an unfavorable manner. This led to the question; will a student's attitude change as reading achievement improves?

Ransbury (1973) noted that children's perception of their own reading ability is often the basis of their attitude toward reading and they are seemingly not concerned about others' feelings toward reading.

Summary and Conclusions

Because of the complex interaction, as well as a variety of causes, it is difficult to single out the primary factor leading to the establishment of one's attitude toward reading. Psychologists report that attitudes are learned, however, it is not completely understood how they are learned. Both classical and operant conditioning have been suggested, depending on the situation.

Elements in the environment determine whether one will develop a positive or negative attitude toward an attitude stimulus. Home, peers, neighborhood, and school contribute to the range of attitudes children acquire as they grow toward maturity. One's personality may be viewed as a manifestation of responses to attitude stimuli and the association with the stimuli as various needs are satisfied.

Apparently each individual responds to a stimuli from a personal point of reference. It is assumed, and strongly suggested, that the home may provide most of the development of attitudes toward reading. Teachers should be aware of all the factors and account for them in their instruction as well as in their relations with students in order to promote positive attitudes toward reading.

Our major conclusion is that teachers have a major impact on their students' attitudes and interests toward reading. The major concern is that teachers often DO NOT carefully assess their students attitudes and interests toward reading. We suggest that several procedures may be employed:

1. Utilize structured observation, employing predetermined criteria for all students.
2. Utilize structured interviews with all students with accurate records maintained of materials read both at (a) home and (b) school.
3. Be cautious about judging students attitude and interests because of their sex or reading achievement.
4. Be cautious about judging students because of home background or natural origin.
5. Remember your relationship with students is vitally important.
6. Extensive reading to students by the teacher is highly recommended.
7. Free reading by students in their areas of interests is encouraged.

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